

# NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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## **FCC RELAXATION OF MASS MEDIA OWNERSHIP RULES UNDERMINE LOCALISM, DIVERSITY, COMPETITION**

**Washington, DC:** Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), ranking member of the House Telecommunications and Internet Subcommittee, released the following statement after the Federal Communications Commission voted to relax mass media ownership rules.

"Today's ruling by the Powell FCC represents an unwarranted and indiscriminate relaxation of mass media ownership rules. The announced changes will severely undermine the cherished mass media policy values of localism, diversity, and competition. As a result, all segments of the population will enjoy fewer and fewer options for independent news and information.

"I believe that the new rules will permit excessive levels of media concentration. For example, the presumptive ability of a single company to jointly own 3 over-the-air television stations, a newspaper, and 8 radio stations in the largest markets is ludicrous, unjustifiable, and will make Citizen Kane look like an underachiever. Contrary to the claims of the FCC Chairman, there is simply no court mandate or congressional imperative compelling the Commission to reach such a sweeping conclusion.

"In addition, the arbitrary nature of many of the proposed rule changes is deeply troubling. The Commission proposes to change the rule limiting the reach of national television networks from 35% of the country to 45%. Given the fact that the proceeding record contains ample support for 35%, the decision by the Powell Commission majority to choose 45% for the new limit is simply arbitrary. Utilizing the so-called "UHF discount," whereby UHF stations are deemed to only count half as much toward the ownership caps that VHF television stations do, a single person under the new rules could own television stations reaching 90% of the country outright.

"Moreover, although the Powell Commission majority stipulates that it is adjusting media concentration rules to take into account cable television channels and the emergence of Internet-based media, it conveniently ignores the fact that the overwhelming majority of the "new" sources of information on cable and the Internet are owned by the same "old media" companies covered by the historic public interest protections that today the Powell Commission largely abandons or eliminates.

"Similarly, the glaring retention of the UHF discount illuminates the true weight that the Powell Commission majority bestows upon the value of the cable television industry now carrying every UHF television station when it comes to rules that media conglomerates support.

"The Powell Commission cannot have it both ways -- if the FCC honestly thought that the presence of cable television and the Internet had so drastically changed the mass media landscape since 1996 to justify the changes in media concentration rules as favored by large media conglomerates, the same reasoning should also have resulted in the elimination of rules, such as the UHF discount, which are

supported by those same media conglomerates. The fact that the Powell Commission majority failed to do so underscores the inconsistent, flimsy nature of its reasoning.

"I concur with Commissioners Copps and Adelstein that these changes are unjustified and that history will vindicate their dissent in this decision. Their actions in this proceeding -- publicizing the proposed media concentration rule changes, seeking public input and traveling widely to do so, and weighing the consequences to democracy and civic institutions of the proposed changes -- reflect what Congress intended the FCC to do in its review of such important rules. I commend them for their hard work and I believe that their spirited efforts in this proceeding reflect the best of what America can expect from public servants seeking to serve the public interest."

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